



SANDY PASCH
STATE REPRESENTATIVE

Assembly Bill 744
Testimony of Representative Sandy Pasch
Assembly Committee on Health and Healthcare Reform
February 24, 2010

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and fellow committee members. As the Assembly author of Assembly Bill 744, I appreciate the opportunity to testify on this proposal in front of you today.

Simply put, this legislation is designed to improve the training of those assisting surgeons in the operating room receive. Currently, the only medical personal in the operating room that are not required to be either licensed or certified or even trained are those performing the role of surgical technology.

In some cases, hospitals utilize the services of a registered nurse to perform this function. That is just fine. But in many cases they do not. There simply are no standards or specific qualifications that an individual must meet before being employed. In this day of highly specialized surgery, we need only highly skilled people in these critical positions.

This legislation will require that a hospital only employ surgical technologists that have received certification from a national accrediting organization and who then meet certain continuing education standards. Those employed as a surgical technologist on the effective date of the bill will be grandfathered, and licensed nurses, physician, and physician assistants would be exempt from its requirements.

This is not a licensing bill. There is no new state bureaucracy established to administer this. This is a simple proposal that seeks to increase the quality of care in surgical settings.

Once again, thank you for allowing me to testify on this legislation today.

Testimony of Susan McNeely
on behalf of the
Wisconsin State Assembly of the Association of Surgical Technologists
before the
Assembly Health & Healthcare Reform Committee
Assembly Bill 744
February 24, 2010

Good morning Chairman Richards and committee members. My name is Susan McNeely. I am here representing the Wisconsin Association of Surgical Technologists.

I first want to thank you Rep. Richards for holding this hearing and especially want to thank Rep. Pasch for authoring this bill along with Senator Robson.

I am here to support AB-744 and to tell you why we believe this will help to improve patient health care in Wisconsin. Before I do that I would like you to know a little about the Wisconsin Association of Surgical Technologists and about the profession of surgical technology.

As the name suggests we are involved with the performance of surgery, be that in a hospital or in a surgery center. We are part of a medical team comprised with the operating physician, anesthesiologists, registered nurses, sometimes other medical professionals, and surgical technologists. In the past we were sometimes called "scrub nurses".

We are the only part of the medical team that is not licensed, certified, registered or in need of meeting any standards.

The common perception is that all we do in the operating room is hand the surgeon certain instruments as requested by the surgeon. That is certainly an important part of our job but in addition to that we do the following: handle medications, prepare suture materials, maintain sterile integrity and are responsible for counting all items used during any surgical procedure.

Since there are no set standards that a surgical technologist needs to meet to work as a surgical technologist hospitals and surgery centers are able to employ who they want regardless of training or experience. Some hospital employ registered nurses but due to a shortage of nurses and the cost of a registered nurse, hospitals often look elsewhere for a surgical technologist.

Some hospitals do employ surg techs that have been trained by a technical college and have been certified nationally but others do not.

To demonstrate how crucial we are to the surgery team we are often named in medical malpractice suits and in some cases we are the cause of the medical error. You have all heard stories of medical instruments left in a patient or a dirty sponge that has not been removed. It is the job of the surgical technologist to make sure all instruments and sponges are accounted for after a surgery.

The lack of standards in our profession resulted in the creation of the Association of Surgical Technologists the National organization and the Wisconsin the State Assembly of Surgical Technology our State society. The primary focus of these associations is to work for improvements in the training and continuing education across the country and in each state.

At the National level there is the National Board of Surgical Technology and Surgical Assisting. This board accredits schools that teach Surgical Technology and also administers the certification exam to individuals that complete the course of study at an accredited school.

Here in Wisconsin all 11 Technical college Surgical Technology programs are accredited. At the current time these schools may administer the national certification exam or a program assessment exam to all students. However by August 1, 2011 all the surgical technology programs must administer the exam to maintain their school accreditation.

Despite the availability of students that graduate from a technical college and have a means of getting certified there is still no actual requirement that hospital's and surgery centers in Wisconsin actually employ someone who is certified.

AB-744 would require that after August 2011 any new hires would need to be nationally certified. Anyone currently working in that capacity would be grandfathered. Hospitals and surgery centers would also be able to continue to employ registered nurses in this capacity if they wish too and there would be no requirement that the nurse receive any special training in surgical technology.

The other important provision in AB-744 is a requirement that surgical technologists in order to maintain their certification would need to complete 60 hours of continuing education in a 4 year period. We feel this is necessary in order to keep surgical technologists current in the latest trends and procedures in surgery. As we all know numerous changes are taking place at a rapid pace.

The 60 hours may sound like a lot but of course that averages out to only 15 each year. The continuing education credits can be taken on line from any number of sources at very or little or no costs. Our State association meets twice a year and offers continuing education courses at a modest cost.

AB-744 is drafted in a way to insure the maximum amount of protection for the patient, least amount of burden on the hospital or surgery center, little additional cost to the surgical technologists, and no new state bureaucracy, state employees or state cost.

The bill requires a certification and not a license. A license would require that the state develop a licensing program, develop and administer an exam and see that licensed holders are meeting their continuing education requirements and that hospitals are only hiring certified people.

None of that would need to be done under AB-744. Under this certification program the exam is already in place, the certifying entity is already established and recognized by all technical colleges in Wisconsin, the technical schools already administer the exam. The certificate is issued by the National board. The only requirement is that hospitals when hiring a new surgical

technologist would need to make sure they have the national certification and that they maintain that certification.

No state inspector will be needed to call on hospitals or surgery centers. It is simply assumed that they will do their best to comply.

We hope that you will support this important piece of legislation designed to improve the safety of your loved ones while they are in the operating room. Thank you.